



Swimming Pools Myths Busted over the Airwaves

By Chris Wiant, MPH, PhD and Ralph Morris, MD, MPH

We recently completed our annual Healthy Pools “radio media tour” of 23 radio stations across the US, during which we dispelled common swimming pool myths and promoted tips on staying healthy in the pool this summer. Here are some highlights from the tour:

Myth: *There is a dye that is used to identify swimmers who pee covertly in the pool.*

There is no dye in pool water to indicate the presence of pee (pockets of warm “water” may be an immediate, but fleeting give-away). Rather, swimmers are on the “honor system” when it comes to getting out of the pool to use the bathroom. We highly recommend doing this (see below).

Myth: *Swimmer’s eyes turn red when there is too much chlorine in the pool.*

Too much chlorine in the pool would be irritating to the eyes, but chlorine itself is not the common cause of swimmer “red eye.” Swimmers’ eyes redden from irritants--known as chloramines--produced when urine and sweat in the pool combine chemically with chlorine pool disinfectant. To quote Dr. Tom Lachocki of the National Swimming Pool Foundation, “Swimmers’ eyes are the real color indicator that someone might have peed in a pool.”

For a healthy experience in the pool: shower before swimming to remove sweat, dirt, cosmetics and trace fecal matter (yes, we all carry some, so please shower *thoroughly*). The pre-swim shower and frequent bathroom breaks can go a long way toward letting chlorine carry out its critical role of killing germs in the pool instead of having to bind with the various impurities swimmers add to pool water.

Use Your Senses and Use Pool Test Strips

Over the course of our interviews, we repeated these simple tips on using your senses to evaluate the “health” of a swimming pool:

Sight: Make sure you can see clearly through the water to the floor of the pool.

Sound: If you are near the mechanical room, you should be able to hear the pool pumps operating to circulate the pool water. For larger pools, pumps might not be as audible. In that case, you should be



able to feel water being pumped into the pool in various locations, especially near the bottom of the pool.

Smell: A properly maintained pool should have NO HARSH CHEMICAL odor.

Touch: Tiles on the sides of the pools should feel smooth and clean, NOT SLIMEY.

Taste: Avoid getting water in your mouth and swallowing it.

Finally, pool test strips are a simple tool swimmers can use to check the pH and free chlorine level of pool water. Order a free pool test kit at www.healthypools.org.

Happy Swimming in Healthy Pools. Over and out!

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